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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION ON BURNS'S VISIT TO YEMEN  
OCTOBER 3-4, 2003.

NEA/PPD FOR MQUINN, JKINCANNON, ACASPER, JDAVIES

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William Burns's visit to Yemen received wide and positive coverage in the Yemeni media in general. Without commenting on the visit, some papers published straight coverage of his meetings with President Saleh and with the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referenda. This time, the media coverage of a visit made by a top US official to Yemen was less negative than has often been the case in the past. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

2. "Al-Thawra 10/04" (official daily) carried straight reporting of the visit and indicated that Burns discussed international and regional developments including U.S.-Yemeni co-operation in the areas of security, counter-terrorism and development with the President.

3. Yemen TV conducted an exclusive interview with A/S Burns on October 4. Questions focused on US aid to Yemen, the future of Palestine and the Road Map and US plans for Iraq and the Guantanamo prisoners. The interviewer raised a question quoting Yemen's Prime Minister, Dr. Bajamal, who said in a recent interview with Reuters that the US is making impossible demands on Yemen in the war on terror and providing little aid in return. A/S Burns disagreed with the Prime Minister and told Yemen TV that it was in the interest of Yemen to have secure borders and fight violent extremists threatening Yemen's economy. Burns also added that Yemen benefited more than any other Arab country from the Middle East Partnership Initiative. Yemen TV broadcast the interview in English with no Arabic subtitles.

4. The bi-weekly English-language Yemen Times 10/06 published excerpts of the Yemen TV interview with Burns. It also covered his visits to the NGOs implementing programs funded by the US Embassy in Sana'a.

5. Al-Sahwa.net of the Islamist Yemeni Congregation for Reform party (Islah) reported Sunday 10/05 that the visit was to discuss counter-terrorism stating: "The U.S. official's talks with President Saleh focused on the Yemeni government performance in counter-terrorism."

6. "Annas" independent weekly 10/06, published an op-ed article commenting that A/S Burns's visit to Yemen aimed to put pressure on Yemen "to comply to more US demands at the level of security and in relation with the situations in Palestine and Iraq."

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